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Masontown school may become senior housing

By Angie Santello, Herald-Standard 03/22/2005

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MASONTOWN - The former Masontown Elementary school building may be converted into a senior high-rise if funding for such a development is approved.

Threshold Housing Development (THC) President Ken Klein said the agency is working on an application to receive funding to convert the school into a 22-unit elderly housing development for residents 62 years of age and older.

THC, a non-profit agency in Uniontown that constructs and rehabilitates housing for low-income residents of Fayette, Greene and Washington counties, is applying for funding through the Fayette County Housing Consortium, a competitive application process, according to Klein.

He said a marketing study done by Mullin & Lonergan Associates revealed that a need exists in Masontown for elderly housing.

Knowing of that need, THC went forward with an agreement of sale, purchasing the building from Pechin Used Cars for \$36,000. Klein said the final phase of the transaction - the closing - is expected to take place soon.

The project, Klein said, will provide safer housing for the elderly in Masontown.

Masontown Borough Council President Carole Daniels, always an advocate for the elderly and those living on fixed incomes, said the high-rise would allow the community to grow.

"There's not much here in the town and this high-rise could be the start of bringing different businesses in

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and other businesses would be handy for senior citizens," Daniels said. "We have the drug store and the grocery store. These are places they could walk to. It would be handy locally.

"We have a lot of senior citizens who can't afford their taxes and utilities and now, in something like this, they can afford it," she said. "If we get that up and running, it will be beautiful. It would definitely be an asset to the senior citizens. We need this."

Klein said he has sent information on the project to members of the Masontown Borough Council and received a letter of support from Masontown Mayor Walter Scarton.

Scarton said Monday that the high-rise "will be a help to the town all the way around.

"It will bring into town people and new businesses," Scarton said. "Instead of the population decreasing, it might increase.

"I'd like to see that building be put to use and this is the better way to use it," he added.

Klein said certain sections of the elementary school building would have to be demolished for construction of the high-rise to clear the way for a parking area and because of poor condition.

Depending on the spaciousness of the apartment, a senior citizen can pay \$415 to \$622 per month to live in such a development, Klein noted.

Since its inception in 1991, Threshold Housing has built or renovated homes for more than 100 families. Projects can be seen in Fairchance, where a subdivision of 43 homes was constructed, and at the award-winning Fifth Street Place in Charleroi.

Concerning the Masontown project, Klein said nothing is written in stone.

He added that he probably will not receive notification if THC receives the money they applied for until September.

Located at the corner of Church and Washington streets, the elementary school building has sat vacant for about two years ago since the Albert Gallatin Area School District administrative offices decided to switch locations to a building along Route 119 in Georges Township.

The school district sold the building to Pechin Used Cars, who is now selling it to THC.

Before the administrative offices, the building was an elementary school into the 1920s. The new Masontown Elementary School located near the old school opened its doors at the start of the 1999-2000 school year.

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